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November 18, 1966

Mr. Merriman Smith
United Press International
National Press Building
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Smith,

Pulitzer Prizes aside, there is a difference between us as writers. I stand by what I have written, I write with honest intent, and I will face you or anyone else on any word I have written, to defend it or, if error be shown, apologize. I am neither a public speaker nor a debater. But I have found, Mr. Smith, that what you also learned from your mother is indeed true: truth is a shield. I find training is not necessary, experience not a prerequisite. All a man needs is an elemental feeling of manhood and the conviction he is right.

You are like a night-sneak. You can and do abuse the great power and audience you command through UPI, which trusts you, as its readers do. You write with evil intent and then, coward-like, fear to face an unimportant man who calls you on it. But if it is the public platform that makes you apprehensive, let us shift to your field, the written word. Here you have imposing credentials, endorsed by the Pulitzer Prize. You find any printed medium and debate your piece released by UPI Sunday. I will write a criticism of it and you will have the opportunity of reading it and answering.

Can I stack the deck more your way? Let me meet you on your ground and I'll let you tie one hand behind my back. But now, of course, you will be too busy, or as unimportant a person as I you cannot concern yourself with.

It is not a "matter of critical judgement" when I say you were in this writing intellectually dishonest. It is a simple statement of fact, and it is for this reason alone that you decline to face me before your peers on it. You, sir, won a Pulitzer Prize for your reporting of the assassination and are the only person to whom I have ever spoken or from whom I have ever heard who does not know exactly where he was when he first knew of the assassination! You "for openers" dismissed my work - slandered is a more accurate term- on the basis of my saying it had rained and on my not correctly representing the organization of the motorcade. Two of the most trivial comments, for openers or any other purpose, slanderous or serious. But it had rained, as the Report says, as UPI said and as AP said. Were those tears shed in advance that lay on Love Field when you got there? And you were at the Triple Underpass when you heard three shots -no more and no less - and the future of the country must rest on your hearing and your recollection of it? You were not at the Triple Underpass. That is the one place you could not have been without the most wholesale perjury in our history. You could not have been any closer to the President's car than the sixth car, and I tell you this without looking it up. If anything else you said in your shameful ax job is true, the best you can do is acknowledge that the shots could not have come from the Depository Building, for you had not yet reached it. Depending on what you meant by behind you, the most likely source of the shots would have been

the sheriff's office or the federal building. Take your choice. But again I point out yourfailure to discuss this with me before your peers denies us the opportunity of testing whether this is fact or "critical judgement".

"As a critic of published works offered for sale ( is this some kind of a shame?) and for public judgement" you are more then entitled to the expression of critical judgement. It is an obligation that in our society is that of the press and is near to sacred. It is the buttress of our freedoms, the very foundation of our structure. Butthis means responsible, critical judgement. Not the cheap dishonesty, the total departure from fact and reality, the pettyindulgence of some unclear emotion, the disgraceful prostitution of an honorable calling that you signed. That bears less resemblance to reality and truth than the garlic wafted over the stew. If you were going to assault me and my book, which is your right (though he will not do it to my face, will you?), then you are obligated, if not by your own personal creed, then by that of the calling you have chosen, to be familiar with that book and to correctly and fairly represent it.

I dare you tell me this is not your responsibility or that you did it!

But your equally sneaky use of the words "offered for sale" raise another question. You have, on the basis of no fact, no knowledge, no critical right, no reasonable judgement, gone out of your way to employ the vast power of UPI for the purpose of interfering with - damaging - that sale, which is also a right (in the case of writing, a freedom).

I have no intention of doing anything about it or even seeing if I might. The institution of the presidency has been besmirched enough, worst by those pretending to defend it. But I hope you will give this letter to Mr. Fransden as the executive of UPI to see whether he feels it might make some kind of gesture at undoing the damage you have done, commercially and personally.

At some point some of you self-appointed defenders of neither you nor I know what must stop and give thought to what you are writing. Unles you do, unless you stop spreading misinformation, unless you stop presuming an instant knowledge and a total recall of all those millions of words in those 27 times, you will soon create a situation in which whoever and whatever you seek to defend or only think you are defending may be denied the opportunity of any defense.

In such a situation, with such issues involved, there can in our society be but one defense of anybody or anything. That is the complete truth, as total and untainted as man can make it.

You might earn the Pulitzer Prize, now that you have it, by starting to look and trying to understand, and not playing God and Daniel Webster both at your typewriter. When you do, you will find, as I have already twice promised Mr. Fransden, that I am willing to help to the extent that I can and as honobably as I can.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Weisberg